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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>A.J.Ph.</i>	<i>The American Journal of Philology</i>
<i>A.J.S.L.L.</i>	<i>The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature</i>
<i>A.N.F.</i>	<i>Arkiv for Nordisk Filologi</i>
<i>A.S.N.S.L.</i>	<i>Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen</i>
<i>A.R.</i>	<i>Archivum Romanicum</i>
<i>B.H.</i>	<i>Bulletin Hispanique</i>
<i>C.J.</i>	<i>The Classical Journal</i>
<i>E.St.</i>	<i>Englische Studien</i>
<i>F.F.C.</i>	<i>Folklore Fellows Communications</i>
<i>G.R.M.</i>	<i>Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift</i>
<i>H.B.V.</i>	<i>Hessische Blätter für Volkskunde</i>
<i>J.A.F.</i>	<i>The Journal of American Folk-Lore</i>
<i>J.E.G.Ph.</i>	<i>The Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
<i>K.H.M.</i>	<i>Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm</i>
<i>Kl. Schr.</i>	<i>Kleinere Schriften</i>
<i>M.L.N.</i>	<i>Modern Language Notes</i>
<i>M.L.R.</i>	<i>The Modern Language Review</i>
<i>M.Ph.</i>	<i>Modern Philology</i>
<i>M.S.G.V.</i>	<i>Mitteilungen der Schlesischen Gesellschaft für Volkskunde</i>
<i>N.M.</i>	<i>Neuphilologische Mitteilungen</i>
<i>N.S.M.</i>	<i>Nuovi Studi Medievali</i>
<i>N.T.T.</i>	<i>Nieuw Theologisch Tijdschrift</i>
<i>P.M.L.A.</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
<i>R.C.</i>	<i>Revue Celtique</i>
<i>R.E.T.P.</i>	<i>Revue d'Ethnographie et des traditions populaires</i>
<i>R.H.</i>	<i>Revue Hispanique</i>
<i>Rh.M.</i>	<i>Rheinisches Museum für Philologie</i>
<i>R.L.C.</i>	<i>Revue de Littérature comparée</i>
<i>R.R.</i>	<i>The Romanic Review</i>
<i>R.T.P.</i>	<i>Revue des Traditions populaires</i>
<i>S.A.V.</i>	<i>Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde</i>
<i>S.S.N.</i>	<i>Scandinavian Studies and Notes</i>
<i>Z.D.A.</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum</i>
<i>Z.D.Ph.</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie</i>
<i>Z.F.S.L.</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur</i>
<i>Z.N.V.</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für niederdeutsche Volkskunde</i>
<i>Z.R.Ph.</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie</i>
<i>Z.R.W.V.</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für rheinische und westfälische Volkskunde</i>
<i>Z.V.V.</i>	<i>Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde</i>

CHAPTER XV

CUSTOM AND RITUAL

IT was the habit of the older school of folklorists and mythologists to approach the problem exclusively from the literary, the oral, side. That method had certain decided disadvantages. In the case of the ancient Greek religion, for example, the oral side meant Homer and Hesiod (with their derivatives). The result was that the whole body of the Hellenic religion appeared, naturally enough, as a sort of magnificent carnival, a kind of prehistoric Versailles, where, if everything was not for the best in the best of all possible worlds, things were pleasant, at least for those in power, that is, the Olympians and their protégés. The darker side of the Apolline religion disappeared, as it were, and the hero cults as well as the cults of the chthonic divinities with their ominous survivals were passed over in silence. Since the days of Friedrich Nietzsche, the first to draw attention to the Dionysiac side of Greek religion, methods have changed, and the cult, i.e. the cult *practice*, now claims the chief attention of the investigator.

As a matter of fact, the discrepancy just noted between *μῦθος* and *δράμενα* is not always so prominent as it happens to be in the case of the ancient Hellenic religion. There it is largely the consequence of the Ionic poetry with its flights of fancy of which the Olympians came to be the victims. As we pass over to the chthonic deities the discrepancy becomes less pronounced, for the simple reason that Homer left them severely alone. Yet it is true all the same that belief and practice need a constant checking up the one by the other, if only as a measure of precaution.

A German scholar of the last generation and an historian of literature who, like many of his colleagues, was somewhat obsessed by the dangers of the study of folk-lore, once pointed out that folklorists are too prone to exaggerate the significance of their finds and that if the numerous survivals actually had the importance with which he believed folklorists credited them,

the countryside would look somewhat like a huge insane asylum. The observation is perfectly correct, though based upon a gross misconception of what folklorists actually do believe to be the case. The reason is to be sought in precisely that discrepancy between theory and practice.

A peasant may hold a certain belief and even communicate it, with the greatest frankness, to the collector. Yet when it comes to practising the corresponding rite, matters are quite different. For one thing, the great majority of beliefs are latent, as it were, and would never, under normal circumstances, find an outlet in actual practice. That is, they represent remedies to be resorted to on extraordinary occasions, in times of war, epidemic, and other great crises of comparatively rare occurrence. Even then the ordinary man will much rather pay a professional, a wizard or witch, for his services than perform them himself, if for no other reason, at least from fear of not doing the act right. It is equally natural that when such a system becomes obsolete, the practice will as a rule be the first to go, whilst the belief, pure theory, lingers longer. A case in point is the so-called foundation sacrifice. It is safe to say that, so far as human victims are concerned, it has not been carried out for centuries, in Western and Central Europe, yet the reminiscences are alive everywhere. The belief still exists, though the practice has disappeared.

On the other hand, the practice may, in certain cases, survive the belief which gave it life, that is, a given rite may be continued, from man's innate conservatism, though the original reason or purpose has long been forgotten. Often enough a new reason is invented and alleged to explain such a practice. A case in point is the well-known custom of uncovering one's head on passing a bier. This practice is now interpreted as a mark of respect shown to the dead. Yet its origin is quite different. In former times the bier was preceded by a cross before which all men had to take off their head-gear. With the coming of Protestantism the cross and the practice disappeared, yet in the case of a bier it was so ingrained that it stayed, though it is now understood as a remark of respect not for the cross (which often enough has disappeared likewise) but for the dead.

The body of customs and rites may be divided into three classes: (1) rites connected with definite days and seasons of the solar year¹; (2) rites observed on definite occasions such as birth, marriage, and death²; and (3) special rites of aversion and avoidance.³

The two central points of the solar year—in the temperate

zones at all events—are the two solstices ; hence the significance of St. John's Day and Christmas. Over large areas of Europe and Asia these two days were fire festivals, either because the fires were supposed to have some magic influence on the sun or merely because of the general purificatory power ascribed to fire. The dates and rites were observed in the Mediterranean countries and in Germany and Scandinavia. Strangely enough, the Celts of Western Europe had a different calendar, the important dates being 1st February, 1st May, 1st August, and 1st November. The astronomical basis of this calendar and its origin are far from clear ; yet like the pagan Roman and Teutonic festivals they have left their traces in the Christian calendar, with the feasts of Candlemas, Walpurgis, the bank holiday on August 1st, and Hallow E'en. The observances on these days have for a long time been visibly on the decline. Take May-day, for example. Throughout the Middle Ages it was a regular feast-day both in England and on the Continent. People went out 'a-maying', and it will be recalled that the emperor Albert I was slain by his nephew on such an occasion. May-poles were erected and there were fairs and dancing. As late as the eighteenth century, when Voltaire first set foot on English soil, he chanced to run across such a festivity showing Merry Old England at her best, and he thought it worth his while to report the matter to France. The old Celtic feast of Lugnasad, on August 1st, so important for the whole Celtic world that Augustus, after the pacification of Gaul, thought it best to leave it untouched, merely Romanizing it a little, has in recent years been resuscitated in Ireland. Yet even in Wales Nonconformity had not succeeded in killing it altogether when toward the end of the last century Sir John Rhŷs collected what is left of the old Welsh traditions,⁴ and in England it was observed under the name of Lammas Day down to Shakespeare's time, if not later still.

We do not know what pagan festival lurks behind St. Bartholomew's Day (24th August), the day of the Smithfield Fair with its roasted pigs. It is curious to note that the day plays an equal rôle on the Continent. By St. Bartholomew's the wheat and rye-harvest is ended, and the wind must be blowing over the stubbles. The days of All Saints and All Souls, both mediaeval institutions, were unquestionably meant to be substitutes for pagan Celtic observances which still lingered on. The festival of the Epiphany (6th January) is a survival of the older Christmas Day which, in the fourth century, was transposed to the 25th of December, the birthday of the *Sol Invictus*.⁵ The carnival is of South European origin and was

originally connected with the opening of navigation each spring, although the derivation of the word, from *carrus navalis*, the ship of the goddess of navigation, Isis in the Mediterranean, Nehalennia in Northern Europe, must be given up.⁶ Nor can there be much doubt about the fundamental fact that the Greek Kronia, the Roman Saturnalia, have left their impress upon the mediaeval and modern carnival.⁷

The period of Lent with its long fast is likewise a pre-Christian institution and cannot be separated from the fasts imposed upon many primitive agriculturists about seed-time.⁸ This fast is supposed to have a good effect upon the year's crop. The Church was satisfied with giving a different meaning to the old custom, and no doubt it generalized it also, introducing it into regions where it had been unknown or less known before. The history of Easter and Whitsuntide would deserve as good a monograph as H. Usener devoted to the history of Christmas.⁹ So far little is known about possible pre-Christian observances that might be claimed as predecessors of these Christian holidays, the Anglo-Saxon goddess Eostere being entirely hypothetical. As a general rule, the continuity of seasonal festivals may be postulated, if a definite and reasonably solid basis can be found. Yet it is wise, methodologically, to envisage the possibility of arbitrary innovations, from historical causes; witness the English Guy Fawkes' Day, now on its decline, the various National Holidays, and the American Thanksgiving. That similar causes were operative also in the Middle Ages, except that the Church played the part now enjoyed by Nationalism, is proved by the institution of such days as Holyrood Day (14th September), the anniversary of the recovery of the 'true' cross by the emperor Heraclius.

The rites themselves are necessarily of a limited variety and as a rule forever recurring. The kindling of fires and the purification of men and animals existed in antiquity (witness the Roman Palilia) as they do now. Nor is there any reason to suppose them to have varied in meaning and purpose. Processions through the fields were no more unknown to the Roman farmer than to the Central and West European agriculturist of our days. Contests between Winter and Summer, in springtide, mummers' plays and races were common in antiquity as in the Middle Ages and modern times. Many of them have left their traces in myth and legend.¹⁰ We may also cite the carrying-out of Death, known all over Western and Central Europe, and the burning of Judas or simply of the witches (Witches' Day in Bohemia); Death, Judas and the witches merely represent the Old Year which must be destroyed ceremonially.

A common ceremony is the ritual beating practised on various occasions, usually in springtime.¹¹ It is supposed to have rejuvenating and fertilizing powers. The wassailing of fruit-trees about the time of the winter solstice is based on much the same principle.

The interrelationship between human and vegetal fertility has always been prominent in man's mind, a fact which explains the peculiarity of many savage and barbaric societies of entrusting the farm labour chiefly, if not exclusively, to the women. It also accounts for the rite of the human wedding in the freshly ploughed field, a rite common in Ancient Greece no less than in Modern Europe, and here too we find the origin of the famous myth of Demeter and Iasion.¹²

In a number of cases the ritual combat is (or was) combined with the ritual wedding in the ploughed field. The acting personages were then representatives of Mother Earth (a woman, later a boy dressed up as a woman), the Old Year or 'Winter', and the New Year or 'Spring'. The action of the play was as follows: Winter and Spring engaged in a combat for the possession of the woman, in the course of which the former was slain by the latter, who married the woman. Sometimes the play was more complicated and Winter killed Spring, but the latter was resuscitated or lived again in the person of a young boy (a fourth actor) who promptly slew the daemon of Winter. Rites of this type have been preserved to this day, and their existence cannot very well be doubted. When they came to be no longer understood they were elaborated into myths, and thus arose, in Greece, the stories of Oedipus who slays his father and marries his mother,¹³ or of Perseus, who slays his grandfather, whilst in Ireland we have the famous story of Balor with the Evil Eye, originally the Irish Kronos, the daemon of Winter and the Old Year, who slays his son-in-law and is himself slain by his grandson.¹⁴ Sometimes, also, the two fighting daemons were regarded not as father and son or father and son-in-law, but as fighting twin-brothers, in which case we obtain myths of the type of the Norse story of Balder and Hqðr and the former's avenger Vali, or the Egyptian myth of Osiris and Set, Osiris's avenger being his posthumous son Horus. In all these stories the woman, call her Iokaste, Ethnea, Nanna, or Isis, is but a personification of Mother Earth, the fruit-bearing earth of the agricultural community.

Fasting is essentially a seasonal rite, though unquestionably older than agriculture.¹⁵ Tribes living on fishing and hunting know it no less than agriculturists. It often goes hand in hand

with a certain amount of self-abasement, as in the Babylonian Sacaea, no doubt likewise a festival closely connected with seed-time and the expected crops, and the Christian Ash Wednesday.¹⁶

The procession of a ship on wheels (*carrus navalis*), known in antiquity, has survived in the countries of the Lower Rhine, that is, parts of Belgium, Holland and Western Germany. It is no doubt a variety of the procession of a chariot, with or without a divinity, such as is described by Tacitus or may be inferred both for Ancient Greece and mediaeval Sweden from a number of documents.¹⁷

Examples of ritual combat live on in many parts of Western and Central Europe, to say nothing of the Orient. The French *behourdis* of Laetare Sunday is a case in point. The place of the combat may be taken by a race, sometimes a torch race. Both rites, combat and race, were common in classical antiquity and have left their impress on the classical stories of Kadmos and Iason.

A special type of ritual combat is the ceremony of the so-called lithobolia or ritual stone-throwing, which has left its trace not only in the two classical legends just quoted but also in the Norse story of Othin and Gunnloð.¹⁸ More remarkable yet, it is still practised to this day by the Mecca pilgrims, though the person against whom it is supposed to be directed is of course 'the Devil'. One might well think it a good thing that the Devil exists. Were he not there, he would have to be invented, if only to explain such survivals, otherwise most shocking to the orthodox.

Nor can one accept as the only possible one¹⁹ the usual interpretation of the baptismal rite as signifying a ceremonial cleaning. The idea of purification no doubt existed in fairly remote times. Yet equally old is the conception of water as the fertilizing element, and the ritual ducking observable in many a rural celebration was probably quite as potent.

The exceedingly large number of harvest rites, first studied systematically by Wilhelm Mannhardt, which have their analogues in ancient Greece and Rome, would fill a volume all by themselves, as would also the ceremonies connected with the vintage, if traced down from the ancient *Karneia* to the vintage festivals of modern France and Italy. Suffice it to say that the fundamental idea underlying them all is again that of fertility, as a rule with reference to next year's harvest.²⁰

Lastly a word should be added about certain autumn festivals, with St. Martin's Night as a sort of climax, which owe their

origin to the ancient custom of slaughtering the domestic animals at that time of the year because the economic system then prevailing did not make allowance for feeding, at least on a large scale, during the winter.²¹ For economic reasons the autumn was also the usual time for the conclusion of marriages, a system which comes out most clearly in the Icelandic sagas.²² This latter fact is indicative of the close relationship that is bound to exist, in agricultural communities, between the festive year with its seasons and the life of the villager, a consideration which will naturally lead us to a discussion of the various rites and customs which go far to make up rural life.²³

The event of a birth, though it cannot be classed among the 'abnormal' incidents which naturally cause horror or fear, is at least extraordinary enough to excite such feelings and to recommend various precautions. The mother is ceremonially unclean, a belief connected with the general fear of woman and menstrual blood. She is therefore debarred from the ordinary pursuits of life, at least until she has been cleansed by her first visit to a church. In many regions, and in the eighteenth century throughout Europe, she was, or still is, enjoined not to leave the house unless she has first gone once to church, preferably on a Sunday. This first church visit, called *les relévailles* in France, is a little festival by itself, and a present must be given to the midwife on that occasion. Until it has taken place, the life of the mother is threatened by various dangers more or less vaguely apprehended. She is particularly liable to be carried off by the fairies, hence the precaution of keeping a burning candle by her bedside. Fire is potent enough to keep away the fairy folk. A number of tales inculcate the advisability of this precaution by relating how the young mother disappeared, the saving candle having been allowed to go out. The new-born child is no less subject to various dangers, the most common of which is likewise that of being carried off by the fairies anxious to make it their own and to leave in its place a changeling. How real this superstition is may be seen from a number of criminal cases, in quite recent times, in which a child had been most cruelly treated because it was believed to be such a changeling.²⁴ As a matter of fact, the baby cannot be regarded as perfectly 'safe' until it has been properly initiated into the class to which it belongs. The ceremony in question is, in Europe at least, the Christian baptism, which is thus given a meaning it is far from having according to the dogmas of the various Christian denominations. In pre-Christian times the rite consisted in carrying the child around the domestic hearth, three or even

nine times, *with* the sun, of course, the opposite being decidedly unlucky.²⁵

Various other steps call forth customs and rites of more or less consequence, as when the child has its first tooth, or when it first goes to school, or when it is 'confirmed'. Yet in the Islamic countries only does a ceremony of greater consequence, that is, circumcision, clearly indicate that the boy enters from one class into another.²⁶ In savage and barbaric societies this step is a most important one, only those which have undergone the ceremony being accounted as 'men' and thereby permitted to marry. In Europe, as indicated, this set of rites has either disappeared or been weakened with the progress of civilization. Yet the mediaeval youth, if a member of the nobility, underwent a series of rites of the same content and meaning on his initiation into the order of knighthood. The custom, so charmingly satirized by Cervantes, lives on, on the European continent, in the guard regiments of certain armies, in Spain, for example. Nor is it possible to dissociate altogether from this train of ideas the various initiatory rites of secret societies such as flourish on the other side of the Atlantic.

Some of the rites in question may appear to us extremely puerile, for the very simple reason that we have outgrown them. If one takes a more historical view of the matter, they will be far less so. There can be no question, for instance, that the ritual watch of the Knight of the Mancha in the yard of the village inn and the whole custom satirized by this episode had its origin in a test of courage; no doubt, at the beginning of the institution of chivalry, essentially Teutonic, the candidate was frightened in much the same way as the savage youth still is during the ceremony of initiation. But the various tests of endurance also have good reasons behind them. One cannot help thinking, for example, that the Orinoco Indians, when they require a young man to lie still, for a day or two, in a sack filled with fire-ants, before they will allow him to contract a marriage, know very well what they are doing and that a similar 'initiation' rite among white people might considerably reduce the divorce rate.

Marriage is indeed considered universally as a most important step in human life, as it no doubt is, especially in societies where monogamy prevails and divorce is difficult and expensive. In the Mohammedan East, on the other hand, it has in many cases been weakened quite as much as the puberty rites have been weakened in Europe, and a similar development is observable in present-day America, no doubt for closely related reasons.

Yet in purely rural districts the human marriage is still a complicated affair, implying a whole set of rites and ceremonies. As one studies them, one gains an impression that the ecclesiastical part of them has been grafted upon a far older set of customs, that both pagan and Christian elements have been almost inextricably interwoven, so that it is often extremely difficult to distinguish the old from the new. Generally speaking, one may say that two particular fears are at the root of all of them, first the fear of the woman, credited with supernatural powers among all savage and barbaric peoples, and second the fear of invisible and vague powers threatening the bridal couple on this important occasion. From the first ²⁷ of these two fears grew such strange customs as the deflowering of the bride by artificial means or by calling in the help of a stranger, customs which survived in the famous *ius primae noctis* (which, to be sure, was at first an *onus* rather than a *ius*) and in a curious fairy-tale type of which the Old Testament *Book of Tobit* furnished one of the oldest variants. The second fear, which was far slower in dying, accounts for the many apotropaic rites, rites of avoidance. The bridal veil is a case in point, being evidently meant to protect the wearer from the evil eye. The noise made by the guests, according to a well-established custom of Central Europe, on the eve before a wedding, is meant to drive away evil spirits. The wedding ring itself, though now little more than a symbol, was originally to have a concrete effect upon the wearer and her relationship to her partner. I say 'her', because the English (and American) custom according to which the woman alone wears a wedding ring represents the older stage; the continental custom, giving a ring to both the wife and the husband, is a late innovation and arose from the afterthought that marriage is a contract imposing equal obligations on both contracting parties, an idea not dreamt of by the older society. It is thus a close analogy to the development of the word 'widower' and its equivalents in other languages. They are all new formations derived from 'widow', which is the original word, precisely because the death of the husband imposed certain observations upon the surviving wife, whilst the death of the wife imposed none whatever upon the surviving husband, so that the latter distinguished himself very little from the rest of the males of the community and no word was needed to designate him especially.²⁸

Nor does the example just given constitute the only close parallelism between marriage and death, and the last rites that can be given to a human being are generally considered as

important as, though somewhat more grave than, the rites accompanying the union of a new couple. The mystery of death would no doubt suffice to give them a character of their own. As a matter of fact, quite a number of different 'leading' ideas may be discerned in the various funeral customs that have been noted down all over the inhabited globe. Most general, perhaps, is the notion that a corpse is ceremonially unclean and that a death renders ceremonially unclean all the members of the family. This idea is at the base of all chthonic cults, which are, essentially, cults of the dead. Special rites are therefore imposed upon the living before they can hope to resume normal intercourse with the other members of the community. The same uncleanness clings to the possessions of the dead man, more especially to his garments. This notion led to the wholesale destruction of property after a death, a custom still observed among many savage and barbaric races, and to this day Europeans and Americans do not relish the idea of wearing the clothes which once belonged to a person deceased.

Of later origin, though to be sure primitive enough, is the notion that the dead 'envy' the living and hence persecute them, not only their former enemies (which would be quite logical), but also their friends and relations. This idea is at the base of the belief in vampirism discussed in a previous chapter. It was also instrumental in the establishment of a set of funeral rites of considerable diffusion. One of these is the funeral games, interpreted, in a period of growing civilization, as a last honour bestowed upon the dead man. In reality they originated with mock-fights, having the very serious purpose of frightening the ghost away. Among savages the duty of this mock-fight rests with the relations of the deceased. In a later development the fight is carried out by hired men, and this custom is thus unquestionably at the root of the Roman gladiatorial combats.²⁹

A more advanced stage of civilization is reached when the dead are thought to be propitiated rather than frightened away. This act of propitiation may be rather crude, as when the dead man's property, among it also his wives and slaves, is sacrificed to his ghost. It may be more refined, as when, as in many Teutonic countries of historical times, the ghost is given the seat of honour at the funeral banquet. We must also class as essentially propitiatory the meals given to the dead man at his tomb and sometimes partaken of by his relations, a custom censured by Saint Ambrose, but indulged in, long after his time, in many countries of Europe, especially among the Slavs.³⁰

A well-known custom intimately connected with these prac-

tices is that of the coin given to the dead, usually put in their mouth.³¹ It was once common in the ancient Mediterranean world, but in the Middle Ages and in modern times has been found in regions never reached by the Roman legions. We must candidly confess that we do not know the road of migration of this custom, though it is virtually certain that it must have followed in the wake of the coinage itself, i.e. starting from the Mediterranean countries and going in all directions with the coined money. The ancient explanation, that the coins were collected by Charon to pay for the ferry is, of course, nothing but an aetiological myth, delightfully ridiculed by Lucian. I take it that the coin is merely the last remnant of the dead man's property which was once upon a time given him or destroyed after his death. The Chinese, less commercialized than the Europeans but hardly less practical, prefer to burn the dead man's property in effigy, a highly economical procedure.

We know far less of the original meaning of the shoe given to the dead man (*Totenschuh*). The current tale about the rough roads of the Otherworld, somewhat like those of certain Mid-Western States, if we are to believe the good curate of Cucugnan who travelled them himself, give one an impression that they are essentially aetiological in character. Nor does the fact that the shoe is a common symbol of fertility³² help very much in clearing up this puzzle.

A number of observances, still in vogue, are designed to prevent the ghost from returning to the place of his former abode. Thus it is imperative that the corpse be carried out of the house in a certain way, that the exit of the soul be facilitated by various methods, that the dead man's guilt be taken upon some one else, as happens in the case of the 'sin-eater',³³ etc. It is neither advisable nor necessary to attempt an enumeration, the less so because there is no dearth of printed collections. But it is of importance, from the methodological point of view, to note that though such customs are apt to fall into oblivion in cases of ordinary death, they will linger in 'extraordinary' cases. Among these must be reckoned suicides and murders as well as death of women in childbed, all of which are regarded as particularly ominous. Thus the custom of carrying a corpse out of the house through a special opening lest, if carried out through the door, the ghost may find his way back, is not now practised, in Europe, in cases of normal death, but it has survived to this day, in the midst of civilization, in the case of suicides.

Very curious is the treatment meted out, here and there, to a person believed dead and turning up unexpectedly. Such

people, *ὄστερονότμοι*, as they were called in Ancient Greece,³⁴ are thought ceremonially unclean and in a number of instances have to undergo a special rite, simulating a rebirth, before they are readmitted among the living.

A very similar rite, both in content and meaning, is connected with the practice of adoption.³⁵ Like the previous one, it is based upon the simulation of a new birth. The adopted person is either drawn through the gown of his adopted mother or pretends to taste of her milk.

Among the 'Threshold Rites' must be reckoned the various coronation ceremonies which still flourish in countries with tradition as a living force, such as Great Britain and Japan. Like the rites of puberty and especially like the human wedding, the coronation of royalty is an initiation. Their essential kinship is in fact so strong that in a number of cases marriage itself has adopted some of the features of coronation, witness the bridal wreath in its relation to the crown.

A typical 'rite of the way' is the ceremony of circumcision, found, as is well known, not only among the Jews and the ancient Egyptians, but among many savage and barbaric nations to this day. Since it is usually performed at the beginning of puberty, it is clear that it was meant to 'divide' the 'men' of the clan from the 'youths'. That such was its function also among the prehistoric Israelites and the Semites in general is proved not only by the modern Islamic custom but by a very significant passage in *Exodus* (iv. 24-6).

The special rites of aversion and avoidance which form the third category are by their very nature more rare and, as a general rule, also more impressive, at least to the outsider. They are called for by special events, usually misfortunes, which strike the community and which make special measures necessary. The foremost of these calamities is an epidemic among men or cattle. A common ceremony in former times, and one still alive in Eastern Europe, is that of drawing a ploughshare around the village.³⁶ Since at night all evil powers are more potent, the ploughing must usually be done by night. An additional feature is that the plough must be drawn by women in a state of nudity. Parallels for the sacred character of nakedness, that is, for its power over evil influences, are found all over the earth.

The same purpose, driving away an epidemic, is served by the ceremony of the need-fire,³⁷ known from one end of Europe to the other and in Asia and Africa as well. A special fire is kindled by an obsolete method, and the cattle are driven through

it, whilst all the other fires in the village are extinguished. They are rekindled from the need-fire. The ancient legend of the Lemnian women has recently been shown to be derived from just such a ceremony,³⁸ and the mediaeval story of Vergil the magician who lets all the fires go out and compels the citizens to rekindle them from one definite spot, has no doubt a similar basis.³⁹

The rite of digging up a corpse regarded as a vampire and of burning it is at bottom but another ceremony designed to put a stop to a raging epidemic, which is explained by the savage theory of vampirism. The rite has flourished until recent times in Modern Greece and on the islands of the Aegean. Crude in the extreme as it is, it was preceded by a still cruder one, to wit, the mutilation of the dead, to prevent their wreaking vengeance on the living.⁴⁰

A rite of aversion is the sacrifice of a human being who is to act as a messenger to the other-worldly powers. The message is given him before his death and often, for the sake of safety, repeated by whispering it into the ear of the corpse. This strange rite is no doubt at the bottom of the Norse legend relating how Othin whispered into the ear of the dead Balder a message which no one else ever knew.⁴¹

Of a more personal nature, that is, resorted to for the purpose of curing an individual disease, is the practice of incubation, already mentioned in connexion with the dream oracle. The custom was widespread in antiquity, its centre being, in Hellenic times, the sanctuary of Asklepios at Epidauros. When paganism disappeared, in theory at least, the Christian saints charitably took upon themselves the duties formerly attended to by gods and heroes. Thus the shrine of the saviour twins, the Dioscuri, at Constantinople, was converted into a shrine of the saints Kosmas and Damian, both being as renowned physicians and healers as the sons of Leda, and the practice of incubation flourished in the Christian church as it had in the pagan temple. Nor is this example an isolated case.

It is curious to note in this connexion how the practice of incubation helped to develop a Christian legend, famous throughout the Middle Ages. In *Matt.* xxvii. 19 the wife of Pilate is mentioned as interfering with her husband on behalf of Jesus, the 'just man', for whose sake she declares she has suffered a great deal in the preceding night. The author of the gospel passage evidently had in view a series of ominous or warning dreams, the stock-in-trade of the classical tragedy. In the early Middle Ages, if not earlier still, the word 'to suffer' was

interpreted so as to allow the inference that Pilate's wife had been ill and, adding thereto the well-known practice of incubation, that Jesus, another twin, had cured her by appearing to her in her dream, just as Asklepios and the twins, pagan or Christian, were supposed to appear to the patient in a dream, either curing him outright or indicating to him a remedy for his ailment.

Dearth, that is, failure of crops, is quite as dangerous as epidemics for primitive communities. Accordingly, rain charms⁴² abound all over the earth, wherever agriculture plays a certain rôle in economic life, however modest. Other rites are of a purely preventive character, as for example the wassailing of fruit-trees already referred to, or the various harvest ceremonies, most of which are carried on with an eye on the next harvest.

A peculiar awe attaches to the first thing undertaken or the first thing received, and special precautions are necessary to avert possible evil consequences. This notion accounts for the special veneration accorded to the first fruit of any staple, which, by an afterthought, is as a rule dedicated to the gods, though the fear no doubt existed long before man thought of anything resembling gods. Again, there is the special treatment given to the first-born, either of animals or human beings, a notion which in some cases leads to the sacrifice of the eldest-born, a barbarous custom of which clear traces survive in the present-day text of the Old Testament, in spite of all priestly efforts of a civilized age to obliterate those very traces.⁴³ The same notion is at the basis of the dislike shown by superstitious people of entering first a new house or of having a deceased relation buried first in a new cemetery. The ancient libation grew out of the same type of beliefs.

If the position of the first is dangerous, that of the last is often no more enviable. 'Devil take the hindmost' is still a current saying, and it is reasonably certain that in a number of ceremonies the hindmost had to fall as a sacrifice. The custom survives in the Icelandic legend of the Devil's School, where the last of the disciples was to belong to the Evil One, who as so often is outwitted by the clever Saemundr.

Entering now upon the means employed in such rites, we have seen before that fire in particular is considered as most effective. Hence the rites of the Need and St. John's fires. Water is hardly less common in lustration rites: it was known in classical antiquity as the best means to clean a murderer from his guilt, or better, from the miasma which was thought to be

attached to him. The witty Frenchman could then well exclaim :

C'est une drôle de maxime
Qu'une lessive efface un crime.

In the latter case a very good means was the passing through the yoke, well known from the annals of Roman history. By undergoing this rite, the soldiers were believed to slough off the miasma of manslaughter. Much the same set of notions lurks behind the ancient treatment of trophies believed to be highly dangerous and hence placed in special sanctuaries.⁴⁴

The ritual ablutions common among many religious systems have grown out of the ritual lustration or purification. As a curious survival from paganism in the capital of ecclesiastical Germany, in Cologne, it was witnessed and duly noted by Petrarch.

Of special apotropaic power is human spittle, hence the widespread custom of spitting to avert an evil omen or the effects of a curse or of the evil eye.

Noise and evil smells are no less effective in driving away evil spirits and breaking charms. The bells of the Jewish high priest no less than the church bells of more modern times have precisely such an object, and the custom of ringing the church bells to dispel hail storms has not died out yet in certain parts of Europe.

Lastly, special attitudes during prayer, known all over the known world, should be mentioned in this connexion, attitudes and gestures such as the continental habit of folding one's hands, the Jewish custom of covering the head, the Mohammedan and Hindoo postures, the Irish druidical habit of closing one eye while the charm or curse was being pronounced, etc. Underneath them all there is a special trend of thought, the hope of making the prayer or curse the more effective by a given attitude of the body. The same applies to the multitude of taboos with which certain priesthoods are hedged around, as was the Roman *flamen dialis*, except that in such cases the benefits supposed to accrue from such observances are of a public rather than of a private nature and all the more strictly enforced. What is true of the priesthood is no less true of the kingship, at least so long as that venerable institution preserved its sacrosanct character, and the many curious taboos and observances have filled two of the most interesting and instructive volumes of Sir J. G. Frazer.

Among the special attitudes observed during prayer there are a few, still in vogue even among Protestants, which may

well have yet another origin, namely, the fear of seeing the deity who is invoked. According to a widespread belief, which has left its trace even in the Old Testament, the sight of a god or a goddess means death or at least blindness, human nature not being able to support such an apparition. One of the most elementary modes of protection was of course veiling⁴⁵ or, in default of a proper piece of vestment, covering one's eyes with one's hands. Quite apart from this general belief, certain divinities or their statues were supposed to be endowed with a particularly sinister glance; witness certain images of Athena and Dionysos. To avert their evil influences, their worshippers took care to veil them or else, when they were carried in procession, to avert their eyes. The widespread custom of veiling on special occasions, for example at a wedding, is but another rite of aversion, to keep off the 'evil eye' and the influence of nefarious daemons.

A very important question, and one which we are as yet far from being able to answer satisfactorily, is that of the diffusion of customs and rites. Are we to suppose that they have originated independently or must we rather think them to have spread from one centre? Off-hand one would unhesitatingly admit both possibilities, and differences of opinion would naturally set in when we came to decide the matter for individual cases. A good deal naturally depends upon the nature of the custom or rite. It goes without saying, for example, that an agricultural rite for which no antecedents can be discovered, cannot be separated from the history of agriculture. This means that all purely agricultural rites which cannot be interpreted as modifications of older ceremonies already in vogue in the fishing and hunting stage must have reached a given district at the same time as the methods of agriculture put in their appearance. This view is confirmed by the simple consideration that primitive agriculture did not present itself to the human mind as a series of (in our sense) rational procedures but rather as a sequence of magic ceremonies each of which was supposed to produce a certain effect. These ceremonies were therefore taught or adopted with agriculture itself. Whether a similar diffusion obtains for all the rest of the customs and rites must needs remain a matter of doubt. What is certain is that all higher religious systems have engaged in borrowings on a large scale from one another and from the more primitive creeds, and the sum total of the Christian ritual has either Jewish or pagan antecedents. One is at liberty to suppose similar borrowings in far earlier times; but definite proof can be furnished only by the cartographical method, when

the areas of each custom or rite will be definitely known. It is to be hoped that the usefulness of such an enterprise will be realized, before it is too late, by Geographical and Ethnographical Societies, and a task be begun which cannot but furnish the most far-reaching results.

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